

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 3, 1952

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SUBJECT: British Proposal to Organize a Coup d'etat in Iran

PARTICIPANTS: British Embassy - Sir Christopher Steel
Mr. Bernard Burrows
G - Mr. Matthews
S/P - Mr. Nitze
NEA - Mr. Jernegan

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STATE DEPT. DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW

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BO 12958, 25X
IPS/CR/IR by J. CRANE

Date: 1-19-99

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Sir Christopher Steel referred to the previous informal discussions on ways of combating Communism in Iran and said that the British Government had not yet come to any definite conclusions. However, he thought both the British and American participants in the recent talks had pretty well decided that there are only three possible lines which events in Iran might take: (1) Mosadeq would remain in power and would take steps to check the Tudeh; (2) Mosadeq would fall or be helped out by the British and Americans and replaced by someone disposed to take definite steps against the Communists; or (3) there would be no change in the governmental attitude and the Communists would gradually take control.

The British view was that Mosadeq was very unlikely to do anything effective against the Communists. They felt he was by nature too vacillating to take a strong stand. Mr. Burrows commented that there was disagreement on this point between the British and Americans. Mr. Jernegan confirmed that the Department and Ambassador Henderson believed Mosadeq was sincerely anti-communist and that if he were able to effect an oil settlement or otherwise strengthen the financial position of his Government, he would take a firmer position against the Tudeh.

I said I understood the British Government was now suggesting that our two Governments should promote some sort of coup d'etat to replace Dr. Mosadeq. Sir Christopher replied that his Government was by no means decided on this point but did think it should be seriously considered and would like us to be thinking about it. I asked some questions regarding the assurances of success of such an attempt, but received only general answers. Sir Christopher and Burrows admitted that the scheme had elements of uncertainty and danger. They insisted, however, that it might be less dangerous than continued reliance upon the Mosadeq Government as a barrier against Communism.

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Mr. Nitze

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Mr. Nitze asked whether it would not be possible to test out the organization with which the British are in contact in Iran by undertaking a campaign against Kashani and the Tudeh without trying to displace Dr. Mosadeq. If such a campaign were successful it would give good evidence of the possibility of staging a coup d'etat to put in a new government. Mr. Burrows did not think this would be feasible because he doubted if the Iranian organization would be interested in an operation which did not involve the removal of Mosadeq. Sir Christopher Steel added that it was difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to do anything effective against the Tudeh unless he controlled the machinery of the Government. Mr. Jernegan concurred in this view.

I said we would not want to dismiss the idea of a coup, but we did feel that at least one more effort should be made to arrive at an oil settlement with Mosadeq. I reminded them that we were presently working on a new line of approach and that Mr. Nitze would be going to London soon for further discussion. I also observed that the present Administration is not in a good position to take serious decisions of this kind since it will be going out of office so soon. Sir Christopher said he fully understood this and did not expect any immediate firm answer from us, although it would probably be necessary to take a decision by the end of January, since the best time for the coup would be in the Spring and a certain amount of preparation would be necessary.

It was agreed that no action would be taken at the present time but that we would keep the suggestion in mind. It was also agreed that there should be no further discussion between CIA and the British intelligence representatives on the subject until further notice. Burrows said that the two British intelligence officers now in Washington were returning to London almost immediately and that in any case it was thought preferable that further technical discussions be held in the Middle East.

NEA:JDJernegan:hh

Jernegan
BNA:TB

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